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Remarks on a late BOOK, Entitled,

Ans: A N *Country*

ENQUIRY
INTO THE
REJECTION
OF THE
CHRISTIAN MIRACLES
BY THE
HEATHENS.

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CHRISTIAN WARRIOR

BY

THE AUTHOR

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REMARKS on a late BOOK, &c.

THE Writer of the *Inquiry into the Rejection of the Christian Miracles by the Heathens* [a] having, as he is well assur'd, [b] an undoubted Claim to one of the two Reasons for making a Work publick, *that what it contains SHOULD be new*, and not willing, that so uncommon a Merit should be thrown away upon his Reader, is careful to advertise us of this Point himself, and accordingly flourishes upon it with much apparent Alacrity and Satisfaction thro' a great Part of his Preface. For, not content with this bare Assertion of his Claim, he grows so elate, as to wonder this important Theme should be

[a] W. Weston, B. D. Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge; and Vicar of Campden, Gloucestershire. Camb. 1746.

[b] Pref. Pag. ii.

be reserv'd for him [c], and that no Sagacity of former Times had been bless'd in the Discovery. Nay, lest his very Patron should neglect him, or, as if he suspected, my Lord might look no farther than the Dedication, he scruples not to mention even there the Excellency of his Work ; and is very frank in declaring his own *good Opinion* of it [d].

An Exordium, like this, we know, is generally inauspicious. However it may serve to one end, not the least considerable, it may be, in an Author's Views, to engage the publick Attention. For it is indeed but natural to inquire into the peculiar merit of a Work, that could inspire its Writer with such Boasts, and fill a Place in it, till now sacred to a real, or pretended Modesty, with such unusual Confidence and Triumph. And this, we are told, consists in *the Discovery of a new Solution of a Difficulty about Miracles* [e], *which had long perplex'd the Inquirer more than all the rest put together*. For, taking into his Consideration the Argument for the Divinity of our Holy Religion, as arising therefrom, *He could not help thinking it extremely odd, that such Numbers of Men, for so long a Time, could reject what to Christians in general, and himself in particular, seem'd to be of so great Weight* [f]. And the Embarras he was under from this Difficulty put him upon looking for some Solution of it amongst the Variety of Authors on this Subject, both ancient and modern ; but to no Purpose, it seems, till the Felicity of his own Genius had struck out a new

[c] Pref. Pag. ii.

[d] Ded. Pag. iv.—The best Compliment I can make your Lordship on the Occasion is the true one, *that I have a good Opinion of the present Performance myself, &c.*

[e] Pref. Pag. iii.

[f] Pref. *ibid.*

new Route, and led him to seek it *in the low Opinion which the Heathens entertain'd of Miracles.*

And now the whole Discovery is out: And to say the Truth, is every way so surprizing, that an Author of less Modesty, than ours, had assum'd a still farther Merit upon it. For wherefore else should He rest in the Honour of a new *Solution*, when the *Objection* itself is *His*? And surely at this Time of Day, when every Species of Hostility has been try'd, and the whole Armoury of the Enemy been exhausted in the Service, it must be deem'd a higher Praise of *Invention* to have furnished new Arms, than to counter-act the Use of them. Nor do I pay the Author too great a Compliment in supposing the *Objection His*, since he fairly owns *it has always been pass'd over* [g], which, in an Age like this, when every Difficulty, relating to Reveal'd Religion, has been sedulously urg'd, and honestly examined, is in effect saying, it was never *started*. And, indeed, this is so much the Case, that, instead of dreaming of any *Objection* from this Quarter, Christian Writers have universally agreed in representing the quick and speedy Conversion of the Heathen World, as an undeniable Evidence of its Divinity. And, for the Truth of the Fact, they appeal to the Testimony of the Heathens themselves, complaining of the enormous Growth of the *new Sect*; which had spread itself over all Orders and Degrees of Men, insomuch that their Altars were neglected, and the Temples of their Gods left, in a Manner, desolate [b]. Nay, the Christian Apologists,

[g] Pref. Pag. ii.

[b] The following Passages brought to confirm this *Fact* are so well known, that, if there was not something uncommonly strong, and subversive of the Writer's *Objection* in the very Turn of Expression, I should scarce think myself at Liberty to transcribe

logists, we know; brav'd them to their very Face with the incredible Progress of Christianity [i]. And thus, instead of its being true, as the Inquirer candidly insinuates, *that there was something so exceedingly perplex'd and intricate in the Subject itself, or something so critical and dangerous in the Solution of it, that it was always thought proper to be kept from View* [k], nothing, on the contrary, can be more evident, than that there is no Difficulty to be accounted for at all; or, if some more forward Projector should affect to make one of it, the Pretence might easily, and without any Danger, admit a *Solution*. So that upon the whole (if a Dealer in Novelties were not too much disgrac'd by so *stale* an Allusion) one should be apt to regard the learned Writer as having been push'd on to this Inquiry by much the same Spirit, as, in an evil Hour, led the valorous Knight of *Manca* out upon his Rambles. For, struck with the Conceit of his own superior Prowess, and considering withall the Loss the World might sustain by his not appearing in it, he marched forth into the Land of Religious Disputation,

transcribe them.--*Visa est mihi res digna consultatione, maxime propter periclitantium numerum. Multi enim omnis ætatis, omnis ordinis, utriusque Sexûs etiam vocantur in periculum et vocabuntur. Neque enim Civitates tantum, sed Vicos etiam atque Agros Superstitionis istius Contagio pervagata—propè jam desolata templa,—sacra solemnia diu intermissa—Plin.*

[i] *Hæterni sumus, et vestra omnia implevimus, urbes, insulas, Castella, Municipia, Conciliabula, Castra ipsa, Tribus, Decurias, Palatium, Senatum, Forum; sola vobis relinquimus Tempia. Tertull. Apol. c. 37.* And before speaking of the Heathens, *Obessam vociferantur Civitatem, in Agris, in Castellis, in Insulis Christianos, omnem Sexum, Ætatem, Conditionem & Dignitatem transgredi ad hoc nomen quasi Detrimeto mærent. c. 1.* See also Arnobius, contr. Gentes, insisting on the same Fact.—*Vel hæc saltem fidem vobis faciunt Argumenta credendi, quod jam per omnes Terras in tam brevî tempore et parvo immensi nominis hujus Sacramenta diffusa sunt?* &c. L. 2. sub fin.

[k] Pref. Pag. iii.

tion, in quest of Adventures ; where finding no *real* Objections to encounter, he was determined however to create *imaginary* ones, and so converting the next innocent Thing, He came at, into a Monster, laid out his whole Strength and Force in the Combat. Where too the Success of the Adventurers is not unlike. For the Difficulty, if it be one, is much too hard for the Abilities of our Inquirer ; as, whatever his Antagonist was, the unlucky Knight, had always the worst of it. For in examining the other Part of the Author's Discovery, his Answer to the suppos'd Objection, we shall find, that as he set out with a Difficulty without Grounds, so he will save it by a Fact without Proof. And this, it will be own'd, consistently enough ; for where a Phantom only is to be engaged, the Hero but exposes himself, that goes against it in *real Armour*.

—— Frustra ferro diverberet Umbras.

But let us hear the Fact itself. It is maintain'd then as the Basis of the Inquirer's whole Work, *that the Heathens in general had a very low Opinion of Miracles ; and that this was not put on by them to serve some particular Purposes, but was really a Principle that influenced their Actions on the most interesting and trying Occasions* [1]. The Inquirer has more than once [m] express'd his Apprehensions,

B

that

[1] Chap. iii. Pag. 38.

[m] Speaking of I know not what *four and dogmatical* Divines, " I am not sure (says he) that I shall escape *their Anathema* ; since it is their Custom generally to be displeased with every Thing that does not fall in with their *fix'd and settled Sentiments* ; and every Defence of Religion that is *out of their Way* wants another to support it." Pref. Pag. viii. And again : " With some, I suppose, the *Novelty* of this Matter will be for ever a Bar to its Reception." Pag. 30.

that the *Novelty* of his Doctrine would, at least with many of his Readers, be a Prejudice against its Reception ; but not once, that I can find, does he appear to have entertain'd any the least Distrust or Concern about the Truth of it. And yet the Public will be apt to think this the fitter Object of his Fears. For, allowing the utmost Weight and Force to the several Testimonies, he has put together, the whole Amount of their Evidence is this ;—*that a few particular Persons, many of them under inveterate Prejudices against Christianity, express'd but a low Opinion of Miracles, which they knew to be FALSE, or of certain REAL ones, which they did not believe.* And where is the Wonder ? Or how has the Inquirer, with all his Sagacity, been able to collect a Proof of the *low Opinion of Miracles amongst the Heathen in general* from the unavailing Evidence of such Witnesses ? For is it strange that the Roman Præfects [n] were not the immediate

[n] The Reader sees I complaisantly allow the Writer's Representation of the Cases both of *Pilate and Gallio*; tho' much might, with good Reason, be objected to each of them. For, 1. If I should lay any Stress on the *Acts of Pilate*, which, He owns, if admitted, would overturn the whole Use of his Evidence, I should but follow in this the best Authorities, and those too supported by such Reasonings, as the Inquirer would find it difficult to confute. And, 2. As to Gallio's Case, however inattentive He might be to the Fame of Paul's Miracles, the Passage alledg'd is certainly insufficient to prove it. *Acts, Chap. xviii. 17.* For, indeed, the Inquirer did not so much as apprehend the Purpose of the sacred Writer in that whole Narration ; which manifestly was not to signify to us Gallio's Inattention to the Apostle's Miracles, but his Candour, and prudent Conduct in refusing to interfere in Religious Matters, and in chusing rather to over-look an Act of Violence, done in his Presence (which, tho' strictly speaking illegal, He might probably think not altogether undeserv'd of the malicious intolerating Jew) than gratify the Complainant's Passion in punishing either Paul, or his Heathen Advocates. For this is the Sense

immediate Converts of Jesus and Paul, on account of the Wonders said to have been done by them? If the Inquirer believes such Testimonies to his Purpose, I will engage to furnish a long List of them, even as many as there were unconverted Heathens, who had the Means and Opportunity of informing themselves of the Truth of his History. Is it remarkable, that the Miracles of one Impostor [o] are not spoken of with *much Esteem* by Writers,

Sense of those Words, *He cared for none of these Things*; which the Writer ought to have seen is so far from proving Gallio's Disregard of Miracles, that, had He been Paul's Convert, the very same Thing had been observed of him.

[o] Aristeas.—The Writers referr'd to in the Margin are Strabo, Maximus Tyrius, Pliny, and Herodotus. Of these, the three first mention Aristeas *occasionally* only; and yet Strabo calls him *αὐτοῦ γὰρ οὐκ ἔστι τις ἄλλος*; and Max. Tyrius and Pliny, tho' they explode his Miracles, yet plainly enough declare the common Creed to run in his Favour. Max. Tyrius in particular, after having given us his Opinion of his Miracles, together with his Reasons for pretending to them, adds, *And Aristeas gain'd more Credit by this Pretension to Wonders and supernatural Communications, than Xenagoras, Xenophanes, or any other Philosopher could have acquir'd, by relating the plain Truth.* Καὶ ἂν πιθανώτερος ταῦτα λεγὼν ὁ Ἀρίστας ἢ ὁ Ξεναγόρας ἢ Ξενοφάνης, ἢ τις ἄλλος τῶν ἐξηγησάμενων τα ὄντα ὡς ἔχει. Lastly, the Account, Herodotus gives us, is so much to the Credit of his Miracles, that one cannot imagine how the Writer should think it to his Purpose to refer to him. For he *was*, indeed, delivering the popular History of Aristeas; and therefore did, as might be expected, represent him, not only as a Worker of Miracles, but as much reverenc'd and esteem'd for them. This he attests upon his own Knowledge of several Cities; all concurring in the firm Belief of his Miracles; and one of them in particular transported by so religious a Veneration of him, as to erect a Statue to his Memory; which they also caused to be set up in the most public Part of their City, and even close to one, they had at the same Time decreed to Apollo. And for the Historian himself, tho' in Truth the Story be even foolish enough, yet, so far is he from speaking of it with Disregard, that I am not certain, if he did not believe it; at least that Part, which relates to the Metapontini; which, after the Mention of some other Things from

Writers, who were not delivering the popular Opinion concerning them, and who had plainly too much Sense to believe them themselves? Or is it so much as *true*, either of him, or the others, he mentions, that they were thus negligently treated by their profess'd Admirers, and Encomiasts [p]? Or, were it *true*, could any thing more be collected from it, than that the Miracles, imputed to them, were too trifling in themselves, or too weakly supported, to be believ'd?

But

Hear-say only, he introduces in the following assur'd Manner: "Thus far the Report of these Cities: But what I am now going to relate, I *certainly know* to have happen'd to the "Metapontini in Italy, &c." Ταῦτα μὲν δὲ πόλεις αὐταὶ λέγουσι. καὶ δὲ οὐδὲ Μεταποντινοὶ ἐν Ἰταλίᾳ συκκυσσάντα, &c. L. iv. 15. and then mentions the Affair, which gave Occasion to the Statue; which, he tells us, he saw himself, placed, as I have said, and inscrib'd to the Memory of Aristæas.

[p] The other Impostors mentioned, as not much esteemed for their Miracles are *Pythagoras*, *Jamblicus*, and *Adrian*; tho' 'tis certain the Writers of their Lives lay great Stress upon them. *Jamblicus* and *Porphry*, after enlarging on several of *Pythagoras's* Miracles, which drew the Applause and Admiration of his Followers, appeal to current Fame for the Credit of these, and of other still *diviner Miracles*, which, say they, are related of him with an uniform and constant Belief, μυρία δ' ἑτέρα θαυμαστότερα καὶ θειότερα περὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ὁμοῶς καὶ συμφωνῶς λέγεται. (*Porph.* S. 28. and to the same Purpose, and nearly in the same Words, *Jambl.* S. 135.) *Jamblicus* even goes so far, in speaking of the *Pythagorean Fondness* for Miracles, as to assure us, that they were conceived to prove the Divinity of their Authors, and by that Means to give a Sanction to their Opinions and Doctrines. Τὴν Πίστιν τῶν παρ' αὐτοῖς ἐπαληθεύον ἡμῶνται ἀπὸ τῆς αὐτῆς, &c. S. 140. They conceive it, says he, to add a CREDIT and Authority to their Doctrines, that the Author of them was a GOD; and therefore to the Question, who was *Pythagoras*? their Answer was, The Hyperborean Apollo, and in Proof of this they alledge the Miracle of his golden Thigh. And yet, says the Inquirer, *Pythagoras* was not much more esteem'd for his Thigh of Gold, than one of Fleish. What Pity is it, the Wit of this Antithesis should be no better supported!

As

But we have not yet done with the Writer's negative Testimonies. For he thinks *that of Marcellinus* should not be passed over; though the most He can make of it, is, that the Historian *dissembles* a Miracle [q] wrought to the utter Confusion of his Master, and *relates an Event, which He was not at Liberty to confute.*

What

As for *Eunapius*, tho' he plainly disbeliev'd the silly Tale of the two Boys of Gadara, yet, in relating it circumstantially, as he does, he clearly enough expresses his own Opinion of Miracles, and acknowledges thereby the Credit they would bring his Master, were they better attested, or but fairly receiv'd.

The Miracles of the Emperors are well known. And as their manifest Intent was, of the *one* of them to add a Credit, or, as *Suetonius* more strongly expresses it, an *Authority, and certain Awfulness, befitting Majesty*, to the Person of *Trajan*, and of the *other* to inspire the Hopes of Recovery into *Adrian*, so the Relation of them by their Historians as useful and subservient to those Ends, is a thorough Confutation of what the Author pretends about the little Regard paid to them. And here it may be proper to observe once for all, that the frequent Narrations of Prodigies and Miracles, of which all Pagan Story, and Antiquity is full, is infinitely a stronger Argument for the high Credit of Miracles amongst the Heathens in general, than any pretended *Coolness, Tranquillity, and Indifference*, which the Writer's Warmth, in the Prosecution of his favourite Novelty, leads him to imagine in the Narrations themselves, is, or can be, for the contrary Opinion. Since *this* could only shew the Incredulity of the Relaters; whilst the *relating* them at all demonstrates the general good Reception they met with from the People.

[q] This Miracle was that of the fiery Eruptions, which hinder'd the Building of the Temple at Jerusalem by *Julian*; and which falling into the Hands of *Marcellinus* might be expected to be spoken of as a natural Event. But this is all: For as to that *wonderful Coolness and Tranquillity*, which the Writer pretends to have discovered in the Narration, it is so far from appearing to me, that on the contrary, I see not how the Historian could have express'd himself with more Emotion, without directly owning the Miracle. His Words are these: *Quum itaque rei fortiter instaret Alypius, juvaretque Provin-*

What comes next is indeed *positive*, but still less to the Writer's Purpose. We can scarce think Him serious, when he would urge the Testimony of Hierocles, Celsus, and Julian, the avowed and virulent Opposers of Christianity [r], as an Evidence of a general Contempt of Miracles in the Heathen World. Nor has he better Luck with his Philosophers. For is the Opinion of a few Atheistical Speculatists [/], and perhaps one or two more of better Fame, of the least Weight in deciding this Matter; especially when it is plain, from the very Passage referr'd to [t], that they saw through the Impostors of the Heathen Miracles, and rejected them *merely* on that Account? Can his Ægyptian Gymnosophists, piqu'd, as they were, at the Reputation

ciz Rector, metuendi Globi flammaram prope fundamenta crebris assultibus erumpentes, fecere locum, exustis aliquoties operantibus, inaccessum: hoc modo Elemento destinatus repellente, cessavit Inceptum.

[r] Pag. 40, 54. 57. [/] Epicurus, Democritus, &c. Pa. 58.

[t] For the Passage referr'd to [Orig. contr. Cels. L. 8] is in Answer to an Harrangue of Celsus, wherein he had expatiated largely on the Heathen Miracles, and opposed them with great Confidence to the Christian. Upon which the excellent Father observes with much Force, "I know not how it is that Celsus thinks proper to alledge the Heathen Miracles as incontestably evident, and undoubted Facts; and yet affects to treat the Jewish and Christian Miracles, recorded in our Books, as mere Fables. For why should not ours rather be thought true, and those which Celsus preaches up, fabulous? Especially, since those were never *credited* by their own Philosophers, such as *Democritus*, *Epicurus*, and *Aristotle*; who yet, had they lived with Moses or Jesus, on account of the exceeding great Clearness, and Evidence of the Facts, *δια τῆς ἀποδείξεως*, would in all Probability have believed ours." Having thus fairly laid the Passage before the Reader, it is submitted to his Judgment, with what Colour of Reason the learned Writer could think of deducing a Proof of the *low Opinion of Miracles in general amongst the Philosophers* from it.

putation of the Indian Miracles [u], and yet, in effect, confessing their Esteem of them by pretending to work such themselves, can these Witnesses be thought deserving the least Credit? Above all, is the Wonder-working *Apollonius* brought in to disclaim Miracles, and that too in a Passage intended only to express his Contempt of some Fooleries in Witchcraft [v]? But what the *Philosophers* could not do for Him, the *Law-givers*, He resolves shall, and therefore brings in a long List of Sages [w], all of them, as he thinks, concurring to establish this Point. But how? Why, in his *negative* Way of Witnessing, in *their making no Pretence to Miracles*—that is, as every Body sees, in their making no Pretence, to what they *durst not* counterfeit, or *did not* want; and when, 'tis certain they *did pretend* to them in the only safe Way of a secret Intercourse and Communication [x]. But the Cause is growing still more desperate. For are the Christian Apologists to be charg'd with this *Evil Principle* [y], and that only for maintaining, in their occasional Disputes with the Heathens, what the ablest Divines have ever done, and still continue to maintain, the Insufficiency of Miracles *alone*, and if taken *by themselves*, to establish the Divinity of any Revelation? An Opinion, founded, as it should seem, on the express Testimony of Jesus Christ [z]; or, if

[u] P. 62. [v] P. 63. Philost. L. v. c. 15. [w] P. 64.

[x] This was remarkably the Case of Mahomet and Numa; the former of whose *Converse with the Angel Gabriel*; his *Journey to Heaven*; and the *Armies of Angels attending on his Battles*—as well as the other's pretended *Intercourse with the Goddess Egeria*, is well known.

[y] It may seem odd that any of the Fathers of the Church should retain such a strong Tincture of this *Evil Principle*; yet this, &c. Pag. 66.

[z] Matthew xxiv. 24. For there shall arise false Christs and false Prophets, and shall shew *great Signs and Wonders*, in-
somuch

if *false*, which has not been made appear, excusable enough in their Situation, when *real* Miracles were own'd to be in the Power of evil Spirits, or when at least the general Prevalency of this Persuasion amongst their Heathen Adversaries might render it expedient for the Christian Writers to argue on the Concession of it. But, ill as this Treatment is, the venerable Apologists have no Cause of Complaint. They share but the same Fate, as ONE much their Better. For the *Dignity* of the Writer's Witness, whatever becomes of their *Evidence*, is still *increasing* [a]; and having made free with the *Fathers* of the Church (for I say nothing of his *Jews*, not only because He confesses them nothing to his Purpose [b], but because, if their Evidence has any Weight at all, it *determines* the contrary Way [c]) having, as I said, made free with the *Fathers* of the Church, He next claims the Sanction of an *Apostle*. Has then the Inquirer one *sure* and *certain* Retreat? And is his Novelty at last, all spent and wearied as it is, to elude our Hopes by finding Refuge in the sacred Writings [d]? So indeed He would persuade Himself, or his Readers. And this, it must be own'd, is *no Novel-practice*. 'Tis ever the last Expedient of a sinking Cause, when forsaken of all human Help, and fearing the just Vengeance of indignant

so much that, (if it were possible) they shall deceive the very Elect.

[a] Our Evidence is still increasing, and is in the next Place confirm'd even by Divine Authority. Pag. 70.

[b] But I could not lay too great a Stress on the Authority of the Jews, because it *neither properly belongs to the present Case*, nor, &c. Pag. 74.

[c] For this would shew, that the *Heathen* Rejection of Miracles *might* not be owing to any Contempt of them, as *sach*, since the *Jewish* was plainly owing to a very different Reason.

[d] 1 Cor. i. 13. The Jews require a *Sign*, and the Greeks seek after Wisdom, &c.

indignant Reason, to strive to support itself by laying hold on the Altar. But the Scriptures are no *Sanctuary* for Falshoods. We shall therefore esteem it no Irreverence to approach the Holy Place, and, as we are instructed in a like Case, to take the *Fugitive* from it. The Case appears to have been this: In the Apostle's Design of breaking an unchristian Faction in the Church of Corinth, which had arose, it seems, from a vain Ostentation of Human Science, his Business was to discredit their misapply'd Learning with the People, and to check the Arrogance of these *perverse Disputors* themselves. To this End he sets himself to shew, that it was not on account of any Advantage of Skill in human Learning or Eloquence, that God was pleased to make Choice of the Preachers of the Gospel; but that, on the other hand, he rather chose the *foolish*, i. e. the illiterate, and uneducated, the better to expose the Weakness of human Wisdom, and to display, with greater Force, the Power and Excellency of the *Cross of Christ* [e]. And this he proceeds to observe is but agreeable to the general Œconomy of God's Providence, which doth not conform itself to our Views of Fitness or Expediency; but most commonly by the Choice of such Instruments and Means, as to us seem *unfit* or *inexpedient*, *destroys the Wisdom of the Wise, and brings to nothing the Understanding of the Prudent* [f]. A remarkable Example of which Method of Dealing with Mankind, continues the Apostle [g], we have in the Dispensation of the Gospel, *introduced* in such a Manner, and *establish'd* by such Means, as both to *Jew* and *Gentile* appear absur'd and unaccountable. *For the Jews ask after a Sign*, i. e. look for an outward, ostentatious Display of worldly

C Power

[e] V. 17.

[f] V. 19.

[g] V. 20. 21. 22.

Power and Pre-eminence going along with, and attending on the Messiah ; and, under the Influence of such Prepossession, make that a *Sign*, or Test of his Coming, and even refuse to acknowledge his Divine Mission without it [b]. Whilst the Greeks, on the contrary, seduced by the Charms of a studied Eloquence, or enslav'd to the Tenets of a conceited Philosophy, require the Gospel to be preached in Agreement to their Notions and Prejudices ; and reject a Redeemer, whose Method of Salvation is not conformable to their Schools, and whose Doctrine is unadorn'd by the Graces of their Learning. Whereas in fact, proceeds the Apostle, our Commission is to publish, in all Plainness, a Religion to the World, fundamentally opposite to the Prejudices of both. For its main Doctrine, and on which hangs all the rest, is that of a *Crucified Saviour* ; which therefore, as being offensive to the fond Hopes and Expectations of the Jew, and not suited to his Ideas of the *Divine Power* and Greatness, is to Him a *Stumbling-Block* : And being a Method of Salvation, neither agreeing to their Conceptions of the *Divine Wisdom*, nor set off with the Colours of Heathen Wit, is to the Greeks *Foolishness*. Tho' yet it is to both these, *Jews and Greeks*, when rightly instructed in the Ways of God's

[b] It is remarkable that Maimonides pushes this Prejudice so far as to deny that the true Messiah was to work any Miracles at all, except that of Restoring the temporal Dominion of Israel. *If he (the Person pretending to be the Messiah) prospers in what he undertakes and subdues all the neighbouring Nations round him, and rebuilds the Sanctuary in its former Place, and gathers together the Dispersed of Israel, then He is for certain the Messiah.* Maimon. in *Yad Hachazekah* Tract. de Reg. et Bell. eorum. c. 11. S. 4.

God's Providence, *both the Power of God and the Wisdom of God* [1].

Thus we see, at length, what the Writer's sacred Authority is come to; which, having no Foundation but in the groundless Comment of a mistaken Passage is thus easily overturned and confuted. For from hence it appears, that the Apostle, far

[1] The right Understanding of what is meant by the Jews requiring a Sign is of such Importance to the perfectly comprehending several Parts of the Gospel-History, that I shall be allow'd to justify, and illustrate the Interpretation here given by some further Considerations. And,

1. If by σημεῖον is to be understood simply a *Miracle*, then it is not true, that Jesus, whom Paul preach'd, was, or could be on that Account a *Stumbling-Block* to the Jews, it being allow'd on all Hands, that many and great Miracles *did shew forth themselves through him*. See John vii. 31. xi. 47. But,

2. Notwithstanding this, and tho' it was owned in the fullest Manner by the Chief Priests and Pharisees themselves, yet we find them very pressing for a Sign, σημεῖον [Matth. xii. 38. xvi. 1. Luke xi. 29.] and that too (which is very remarkable) at the Instant our Saviour had been working a Miracle before them. A Degree of Perversity not rashly to be credited by the Jews themselves.

'Tis true this Sign is sometimes called σημεῖον αὐτοῦ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, a *Sign from Heaven*; which, if meaning any thing more, than σημεῖον, as explained above, i. e. a *Test* or *Credential* of his Heavenly or Divine Mission (and what can be more natural than that the Jews should express by this Name, the *only* Mark they would admit of the Messiah's coming from Heaven?) I say, if any thing further be intended in it, it must be either,

1. An outward, sensible Display of the Divine Power, *indicating*, by some prodigious and splendid Appearance in the Heavens, or actually *interposing*, in some signal Way, to *accomplish* the Deliverance of Israel; and then either Way it falls in with and includes the Interpretation here given. Or else, 2. It must mean a mere *Prodigy*, asked out of Wantonness, and for no other End, than to gratify a silly Curiosity in beholding a wondrous Sight from Heaven: An Interpretation, which tho' maintain'd by some good Writers, is utterly unsupported by the sacred Accounts, calling it σημεῖον indiscriminately, without, as with, the Addition of τοῦ οὐρανοῦ; and shocking to common Sense, which makes it incredible that so frivolous a Reason

far from attesting his Whimsy of *the low Opinion of Miracles amongst the Heathens*, does not so much as speak of Miracles at all : Or, if he must be made an Evidence in the Cause, gives Judgment against him ; as plainly enough expressing his Opinion, that it was not a *Contempt of Miracles*, but the *Conceit of Wisdom*, which made the great Difficulty in converting the Pagan World.

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son, as the being deny'd a *Sign*, thus understood, could be, as St. Paul asserts it was, *the Stumbling-Block* of Infidelity to the Jewish Nation.

3. But what above all confirms and fixes this Interpretation, is the Tenor of our Saviour's Answer to the Question itself. For upon the Inquiry, *Master, shew us a Sign*, &c. his constant Reply was, *A wicked and adulterous Generation seeketh after a Sign, and there shall no Sign be given them, but that of the Prophet Jonas : For, &c.* As tho' he had said, " A perverse and degenerate People, disregarding the Wisdom of my Doctrines, and the Power of my Miracles—the genuine Marks and Characteristics of the Messiah—are yet crying out for the *Test*, *σημαν*, of my coming. I know the proud, and ambitious Sentiment of your Heart. But assure yourselves, God will not accommodate his Proceedings to your fond Views and Prejudices. No such *Test* shall be given you. One sure and certain TEST indeed there shall be, over and above what has yet been afforded ; but to shew you, how widely different the Divine Conduct is from your Prescriptions, it is such a one, as ye shall least expect ; the very Reverse of your Hopes and Expectations. It shall be that of the Prophet *Jonas*. For as *Jonas was three Days and three Nights in the Whale's Belly*, so shall Christ (sad Contradiction to your Conceit of temporal Dominion!) be put to Death by the Jews, and lie three Days and three Nights in the Heart of the Earth. And this Event, so degrading of my Character with you, and so repugnant to your Wishes, shall, I readily foresee, so scandalise you, that, tho' my Return from the Grave, like that of *Jonas* from the Whale, shall be in the Demonstration of Power, yet shall ye, thro' the Inveteracy of that Prejudice, be so harden'd, as not to be convinced by it."

The Answer of our Saviour is related by *Matthew and Luke* with some Addition, but such as is further favourable to this Interpretation.

And now having dispersed his *Cloud of Witnesses* (which, unlike the *sacred* one, it would seem to resemble, instead of illustrating and reflecting a fuller Light on the *Fact*, it surrounds, serves only to obscure and conceal it) having shewn, I say, if not the Fallshood of his *Fact*, at least the Insufficiency of his *Evidence* to support it, I might fairly dismiss the Remainder of his Book without any Confutation ; the following Chapters, as he tells us,

Interpretation. For upon their asking a *Sign*, it is plain he understood them to mean not a *Miracle*, but a *TEST*, by the Question immediately put to them. *When it is Evening, ye say, it will be fair Weather ; for the Sky is red. And in the Morning, it will be foul to day ; for the Sky is red and lowering. O ! ye Hypocrites, ye can discern the Face of the Sky ; but can ye not discern the Face of the Times ?* “ Are the Appearances, which, “ in the Order and Constitution of Nature, precede the Changes “ of Weather, a *Sign*, or *Test* to you of those Changes ? And “ are ye stupid and perverse enough to neglect those, which, “ by the Divine Appointment, are made the *Sign* or *Test* of the “ TIMES, of the Change of the Mosaic for the Christian Dispensation ? How is it, that ye do not collect this from my “ *Miracles and Doctrine*, the ordinary and stated Marks of this “ Change, but ye must perversely demand a *Test* of it, which “ the Scriptures no where promise, and the Order and Course of “ God’s Providence disclaim ? ”

If, after all this, there can yet remain any Doubt of the Truth of this Comment, it will be effectually removed by an Authority or two from the other Evangelist, which the Reader will indulge me in just mentioning. In our Saviour’s exerting an Act of Civil Power in scourging and driving the Money-Changers out of the Temple, the Jews require him to shew the Credentials of his Authority, *What Sign shewest thou, that thou doest these Things ?* The asking a *Miracle* in this Case were impertinent. For that, how extraordinary soever, could never prove to the Jews, that he came invested with the Powers of the Civil Magistrate. The *Sign*, they expected, then was evidently of another Kind : An express Declaration, or open Display, of the Regal Character and Office, evidencing his Commission to do such Things. Accordingly the Reply of our Saviour was to the same Effect, as before. *Jesus said unto them, Destroy this Temple and in three Days I will raise it up.* For he spake, we know, of the Temple of his Body. c. ii. The

us, being intended to account for this Fact, which he presumes to have fully established. But, as he appears unwilling to rest the Whole of his Cause on the Merit of so slight an Evidence, and has therefore engaged for a further Confirmation of it in the following Pages [k], it will be proper to collect in a few Words, what additional Evidence may arise from that Quarter : And in doing this, I shall think it

The next Authority is in the Sixth Chapter, where we have an Account of the Miracle of feeding *the five Thousand*. Upon the Multitude's following him after this, our Saviour objects to them their Neglect of Miracles, which he presses upon them as Motives to their Belief. *Ye seek me not, because ye saw the Miracles, &c.* Now what do the Jews return to this Charge ? Why, they fairly own it to be just, and, what is more, give a Reason for their Conduct. Their Answer is to this Effect : " Wherefore do you urge your Miracles thus constantly to us, as Motives for our Belief ? If you would have us trust and confide in you, as the Messiah, *Where is the Sign ?* For, as to your Miracles so often insisted on by you, we cannot admit them, as proper Evidences of your Commission. And indeed how should we ? For Moses wrought as great, if not greater Wonders than you. To confront your late boasted Miracle of feeding *the five Thousand with five Loaves*, did not he, as it is written, *give our Fathers Bread from Heaven ?* What Miracle of yours can be more extraordinary ? Yet *Moses* could do this. The Messiah, therefore, of whom greater Things are promised, we expect to be *characteris'd* by other *Signs*. What Work takest thou in Hand, *τι σπουδαν ?* Here, at last, we see (and the Reader will forgive the Length of the Note for the sake of so clear Conviction) that the *Sign*, ask'd for, of what Kind soever it might be, neither *was*, nor *could* be a Miracle, since all such *Signs* were rejected by these Inquirers upon *Principle*.

[k] I have now done with this Head [the low Opinion of Miracles in the Heathen World] and am not aware that any reasonable Exceptions can be made to the Testimonies which have been brought to confirm it ; but if any one should think otherwise, and maintain that something else is necessary for the Establishment of so *singular* an Opinion, he will be *gratify'd* in his Expectations, as we *go along* ; and will find the Principles and Practices of much the greater Part of the Heathens on this Point *strengthening and confirming* each other. Pag. 77.

it sufficient to examine, not his Premises, but Conclusion ; and so, leaving him in full Possession of his *Facts*, to argue with him, in Agreement to the Design of these slight Sheets, on the Weight and Force of his Deductions. And here,

1. Allowing him to have proved *the Vanity of the Heathen Pretensions to Miracles*, c. iv. v. iv. in the fullest Sense he can wish ; and that no *real Wonder* was ever wrought, or *Oracle* delivered, by any of the numerous Pretenders to either, what will the Author say is the proper Inference from it ?—That therefore the Heathens *could* not but have a low Opinion of Miracles ? That, indeed, would be to his Purpose ; but nothing can be less supported. For were not such Miracles, and Oracles at least generally believed ? Or, if several Impostors were detected, does the Author imagine that such Detection would utterly sink the Credit of all future Miracles [1] ? A writer, so skill'd in the Workings of Superstition, and who appears to have taken much Pains to pry into the dark Corners of Humanity, ought to know, that the Passion for Wonder is a Foible too *intimately* connected with our Nature to be thus easily drawn out from it. And the History of Mankind gives the strongest Confirmation of this, in relating, as it does, notwithstanding the presum'd Effect of such Discoveries, the very ready Reception, which Miracles have ever met with. The Truth is, the Inquirer might as well have set himself to prove *the Vanity of the Popish Pretension to Miracles*, and then have infer'd, from the frequent Detection of Impostors amongst them, that therefore the Papists cannot but

[1] For this he must say, and not that the Credit of Miracles would hereby be something weakened : A Point, that, as we shall see hereafter, may be allow'd, and yet be of no Manner of Service to his Conclusion.

but have a very low Opinion of Miracles. This, I say, had been as logically inferr'd ; and yet, I believe the first Traveller from Rome, or next Account he should look into of Italy, or Spain, would infallibly spoil the Argument, and confute his Conclusion. And, to do the Author Justice, he seems not unconscious of this, when, after all the learned Pains he had taken to establish this Point, he allows, *that tho' his Argument had shewn, what little Reason the Heathens had to think, that Miracles had ever been wrought amongst them at all, yet it does not of Consequence follow, that they would certainly make Use of the Light, that was held out to them ; but observes, that whether they did or not, their Esteem of Miracles will be but little increas'd ; for if ever they were alarmed by an Appearance, which they could not tell how to account for, or over-borne by the Weight of such Testimony, as they could not tell how to invalidate, the Principle of Magic was one general Recourse.*

2. His Strong-Hold, then, we see, at last, is MAGIC. We shall follow him therefore one Step further, and try if we cannot dislodge him from it. The Fact conceded to him is, *that the Persuasion was pretty general in the Heathen World, that, by Means of Magic, that is, of certain superstitious Rites, and Sacrifices, and by certain Words and Invocations of Dæmons, many Things could be done exceeding the Power of Man ; and that accordingly many seeming Miracles, wrought amongst them, were imputed to this Power of Magic.* But then to infer from hence, as the Inquirer would have us, that therefore the Heathens under the Persuasion of these Principles, must necessarily entertain a very low Opinion of all Miracles, is sure concluding too fast. For, tho' I could admit this to be a tolerable Reason for the Rejection of some Pagan Miracles

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Apostles,

247] in great Repute.

[N] For that this was the obvious and essential Difference betwixt the genuine Miracles of the Gospel, and the Tricks of Magic, is apparent from many strong Expostulations of the Christian Apologists, who, when encounter'd with this frivolous, but malicious Objection, us'd to exclaim: *Potestis aliquem nobis designare, monstrare ex omnibus illis magis, Qui unquam fuere per sæcula, consimile aliquid Christo millefimo ex parte qui fecerit? Qui sine ulla vi Carminum, sine herbarum aut graminum succis, sine ulla aliqua observatione sollicita sacrorum, libaminum, temporum? &c. Arnob. contr. Gen. L. i. And again, Ibid. At qui constitit Christum sine ullis Adminiculis rerum, sine ullius ritus observatione vel lege, omnia illa, quæ fecit, nominis sui possibilitate fecisse; et quod proprium, consentaneum, Deo dignum fuerat vero, nihil nocens, aut noxium, sed opiferum, sed salutare, sed auxiliariis plenum bonis potestatis munificæ liberalitate donasse.*

Apostles, as were sufficient to manifest the Difference of their Miracles from those of Magicians, and to assert the Divinity of their Mission, in the very Judgment of the Magicians themselves [o]. And this, as it seems, always with such illustrious Evidence, as to render it inexcusable in those, who had the Opportunity of seeing and examining the Difference, to remain unsatisfied of it. For I cannot but think it worthy the Inquirer's Regard, tho' no Novelty, that the Heathen Charge of *Magic*, was but in other Words the Jewish Accusation of *Beelzebub*; either of them the genuine Result of pure unallay'd Malice, and, concerning which, our Saviour's Determination is well known. And therefore when the learned Writer contends, that the Heathens had a low Opinion of Miracles in general, on account of the supposed Power and Efficacy of Charms, and magical Incantations, he might with equal Reason here have taken upon him to shew, that the Jews also had a low Opinion of Miracles in general on account of the supposed Power of their Diviners, and Sorcerers, of which we likewise hear much amongst them, and from their ascribing, as we know they did, many miraculous Effects and Operations to them: An Opinion, which, I presume, the learned Writer will not find it to his Purpose to maintain.

3. As to the Author's Argument from *the Multiplication of the Heathen Gods* (which is the only remaining Part of his Book I think myself concern'd in [p]) if he means to conclude from it, that in
Consequence

[o] Acts. C. viii. & xix.

[p] For as to the remaining Chapters on the *Idolatry of the Heathens, the Parallel betwixt the Heathen and Protestant Rejection of Miracles, and his Conclusion*, they seem very little to concern either him, or me. For, 1. The Influence of Idolatry

Consequence of the Multitude of pretended Miracles, flowing from such Belief, Miracles themselves must of Necessity *lose their Force, and sink in their Esteem* [q], it is very frivolous, and admits an easy Answer. For, besides its inherent Weakness of bad Logic, in concluding from a Cause of possible Efficiency to a *certain* Effect, it has the Misfortune, in common with his other Reasonings on this Subject, to be confuted by plain Matter of Fact. And, for his Satisfaction in this Point, I refer him once

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more

is urg'd to prove, that the *Religion*, not *Miracles*, of Jesus, was *hard to be admitted* [p. 352] which, tho' true, has nothing new in it, and is, besides, intirely foreign, if not contradictory, to his Purpose. 2. *The Parallel betwixt the Heathen and Protestant Rejection of Miracles* derives all its little illustrative Force from this poor Presumption, already confuted, that the Heathens had universally a *Contempt of Miracles*. I said the Parallel drew its whole Force from this Fact, for unless it be true that the Heathens universally disbelieved all Miracles said to be wrought amongst them, the Case of their Rejection, of Christian Miracles, the Reader sees, is widely different from that of the Protestant Rejection of the Popish. This one Circumstance then, to mention no others, overturns the whole Use of his Parallel. But, 3. As to his Conclusion, the Design and Business of that is, I allow, something extraordinary. It is to shew us, that his whole Force was not spent in this wearisome Inquiry, but that, was he disposed for it, he *could* go on to answer other Objections against Miracles [P. 408-9] and our common Christianity, which had been already confuted to his Hands. For, having shewn us what he *could not* do with an Argument of his *own*, he was willing, it seems, to shew us what he *could* do with those of *other Writers*. For which meritorious Service he has my Compliments and Congratulations :

Labore alieno magno, partam Gloriam
Verbis sapè in se transfert, qui sal habet,
Quod in T E est.

[q] Pag. 348. and in another Place he says, it has been fairly shewn both from *their own Accounts*, and from THE NATURE OF THEIR PRINCIPLES, that the Heathens neither *bad*, nor *could* have an high Opinion of Miracles. Pag. 383.

more to the Case of the Romanists ; who, notwithstanding the Multiplicity of their Saints, all of them Dealers in Miracles, and swarming in such Numbers as to equal, if not exceed, the Rabble of Pagan Divinities, do not yet appear to have contracted from thence any Disrelish, or Disesteem for Miracles. The Truth is, the whole additional Evidence arising from the main of his Book in Confirmation of his pretended Fact, *that the Heathens entertained a low Opinion of Miracles*, is so very inconsiderable, that, as we now see, it hardly amounts to a bare Probability. For, after all, the Reader will perhaps incline to think, contrary to what the learned Writer directs him, that such Prevalency of Magic, and Multiplicity of Gods, is no bad Proof of the Esteem and Credit, that Miracles were in amongst them. At least, 'tis no unfair Presumption, that a People could not be so averse to Miracles, as the Author pretends, nor generally be possessed by a thorough Contempt of them, when, notwithstanding the frequent Detection of *false* Miracles, and more than one degrading Solution at Hand for the *true*, they should yet be able to maintain their Ground, and take such Footing in the popular Belief, as to be continually affording fresh Occasion to Imposture, and fresh Encouragement to the Dealers in this Traffic to practise on the Wonder and Credulity of Mankind.

2. And whoever sets out with this Surmise, (which is apparently not ill-founded) will find it greatly strengthened in observing, that of all the Reproaches cast upon the Heathen World, and of all the Prejudices objected to them by the first Propagators of Christianity, this of the Contempt of Miracles was not so much as once mentioned, there not being the least Hint, or remotest Intimation in the sacred Writings of their labouring under any peculiar

peculiar Prepossession of this Kind. A Circumstance perfectly unaccountable, if what the Inquirer contends for be true, since such Prepossession could not but greatly obstruct the Apostolic Labours, and make it necessary for them to bend their first Care and Application that Way.

3. And it raises the Wonder still higher to observe, that whilst the Heathens escape uncensured in this Respect, the Jews are severely rebuked for their Incredulity and disregard of Miracles [r]; where too, by the very Cast and Turn of the Re-proof, the Heathens are to be understood as less chargeable on this Head, than the Jews.

4. But, what has still the worst Aspect on the Writer's Scheme, is, that whilst the Apostles are quite silent as to this Charge upon the Gentile, nor appear once to rank it in the List of such Impediments, as retarded the Conversion of the Pagan World, they are at the same time very express in declaring to us, what the chief of those *Impediments* were. They in part have been already suggested [f], and were, if St. Paul may be credited, in Reality, these: 1. *A Conceit of superior Wisdom* amongst the Men of Letters and Education [t]. And, 2. *The Corruptions and gross Idolatries* of the People at large [u].

5. But what! it will after all be asked, Is there then no Truth in what the learned Writer has advanced concerning the Heathen Contempt of Miracles; and in particular, is his long Detail of Principles and Circumstances, concurring, as it should seem, to produce such Contempt, utterly without all Force or Meaning?

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[r] Matth. xi. 20. Luke x. 13.

[f] Pag. 39.

[t] 1 Cor. i. Col. ii. 8.

[u] Rom. i. Eph. v. and elsewhere *Passim*.

This has no where been said ; and ~~the~~ the contrary is what I am now ready to affirm. For, to do the Inquirer Justice, it was upon the Basis of a good, old Truth, that this wondrous Novelty was erected. A fine Writer [v] will tell us what it was. “ We may observe,” (says he, in accounting for the Silence of Pagan Writers in respect of our Saviour’s History) “ that the ordinary Practice of “ MAGIC in those Times, with the many pretended “ PRODIGES, DIVINATIONS, APPARITIONS, and LOCAL MIRACLES amongst the “ Heathens, made them less attentive to such News “ from Judæa, till they had Time to consider the “ NATURE, the OCCASION, and the “ END of our Saviour’s Miracles, and were “ awaken’d by many surprizing Events to allow “ them any Consideration at all.” We see here the Ground-Work of our Author’s Performance, and have determined to our Hands with great Accuracy, how far his general Position is true, and to what Extent the particular Circumstances and Situation of the Heathens would in *Reality* affect their Opinion of Miracles. Had the learned Writer confin’d himself within these Limits, he would, I conceive, have had Reason and History on his Side, and, whatever Alarm he may be in *from the forward and contentious Spirit of Party in Religion*, no *Enemies* to oppose him. But then this, it must be own’d, had been saying nothing *new* : The World had lost the Benefit of a Discovery, and the Author, what of all Things he would most regret, the Glory of his INVENTION.

[v] Mr. Addison of the Christian Faith, S. 1.

T H E E N D.



